

Experts look forward at N. Valley's economy

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Between a rollercoaster stock market, oil prices flirting with \$100 a barrel and a meltdown in the housing and mortgage industries, 2007 was a turbulent year for the American economy. The North Valley was no exception.

The Phoenix Republic recently sat down with three leaders in the North Valley's business community to look back at last year and ahead to 2008. Eric Kilstrom, Debbie Drotar and Craig Boates weighed in on the issues most likely to impact the local economy in 2008, from a statewide crackdown on employers of illegal immigrants to expanded construction on Interstate 17 to a deep slump in the housing market. And each offers predictions for what the coming year has in store for the area.

Eric Kilstrom is president of the Chamber of Commerce at Anthem. He also runs Great Southwest Mortgage in Anthem.

Debbie Drotar works for the Great Phoenix Chamber of Commerce. She serves as its liaison to both its Anthem and Deer Valley chapters.

Craig Boates is president of the Deer Valley Chamber of Commerce. He is also a partner in the law firm of Boates and Crump, which has offices in Anthem and Deer Valley.

[Note: article has been edited to remove all non-freeway items]

Q: Construction on I-17 is going to get worse in 2008 before it finally gets better in 2009. What impact is the construction and consequent congestions going to have on local businesses next year and how can they best manage to minimize that impact?

Drotar: It is a concern. It's been a long-time concern as the Anthem area and this far north Phoenix area has expanded residentially. We've had lots of houses, but again, as Craig mentioned, not lots of services. It is constrictive for services to go back and forth to our areas up here from mid-Phoenix or north Phoenix or wherever in the Valley. So you kind of have to take the bitter with the sweet . . . we have to endure the pain of the widening of I-17 and just kind of bear with the whole process. At least it's on the books, at least we have the funding, at least it's going to happen.

Boates: I've actually been pleasantly surprised with how the construction has gone. I think ADOT's done a pretty good job of minimizing the impact. It's not often that you have lane restrictions or lane closures. There are usually two lanes open at all times,

which is what we had before . . . obviously you get a few slowdowns every once in a while but (ADOT) has done a very good job of managing a huge construction project and really minimizing the impact on the area.

Kilstrom: I haven't noticed much of an impact at all. Everybody is so excited about the construction. Everybody complained for so long about I-17. Once they start widening it, you have to tell the complainers to stop complaining. That at least they (ADOT) are doing something. It is going to be a huge asset once it's complete and that's what we're looking at. There's no use complaining.